



Pacific approaches to fundraising in the digital age: COVID-19, resilience and community relational economic practices

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to discuss how community relational economic practices in virtual spaces are effective in building resilience because they are borne of and sustained by familiar traditional Fijian values of collective work and social interdependence. The researchers adopted a pandemic-induced methodology, conducting online-based talanoa (fluid conversations between two or more people) with a number of people leading, or involved in, these initiatives. We also engaged with online community groups behind a number of initiatives. Examples are provided of online crowdfunding, livestreaming of concerts to solicit donations, and bartering facilitated by social media sites. To conclude, we stress the enduring nature of communal bonds and traditional systems which Pacific people readily adapt and translate into different forums and forms in the face of challenges such as the restrictions and financial hardships caused by COVID-19. The findings highlight that solesolevaki – a tradition of working together for a common cause – can also occur in the digital era: this demonstrates the deep connection of Fijian peoples and their sense of obligation to one another and to their culture, regardless of where they are in the world.*

Keywords: *adaptivity, community relational economic practices, COVID-19, diverse economies, resilience, virtual space*

Introduction

The impacts of COVID-19 have been globally pervasive. Those impacts are, however, disproportionately felt by some regions and peoples across the world. By mid-2021, Fiji's dual health and economic crises were reflected in its communities' struggle to make ends meet as mass job losses, restrictions in movement, lack of food and the harsh reality of a full-blown outbreak of the Delta variant became more entrenched. While Fiji grappled with collapsing health infrastructure, soaring death rates, and an apparent overload of mortuary services, its government continued to rest its ambitions on a rapid vaccination programme and on maintaining economic survival through its plan to reopen the country's borders to international travellers. This plan has seen Fiji now open for tourists since December 2021.

Fiji's heavy reliance on a halted tourism industry (34% of GDP and 36.5% of employment) (Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Tourism, 2021), contributed to the economic fallout with mass layoffs and the government stating the need for radical financing to survive this crisis (Krishant, 2020; Finau and Scobie, 2022). Some Fijian citizens who lost their source of livelihood were supported with food rations and small cash payments thanks to overseas aid and the work of NGOs, but for the vast majority of communities the crisis continued to deepen. As it turned out, there was a level of ingenuity – sparked by necessity – present among those who were left to their own devices.

Faced with their difficult reality, Fijian communities embraced *solesolevaki*: the age-old tradition of working together for a common cause, especially in tourism-dependent communities (Movono and Scheyvens, 2022).

While there are longstanding practices of communal work to tidy up villages or to raise funds locally for community facilities, for example, their pandemic-induced activities reached beyond the ordinary geographical and physical livelihoods realms, taking to virtual spaces to engage in this tradition. At the time of our data collection in 2021, digital giving in Fiji was an increasing trend. Fijians in-country and the diaspora spread around the world were using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and live-streaming events to raise funds to support one another through this crisis.

The aim of this paper is to discuss how relational economic practices in virtual spaces are effective in building resilience because they are borne of and sustained by familiar traditional Fijian values of collective work and social interdependence. To begin, we examine the nature of relational economic practices in communities, which are often overlooked and undervalued, yet which have played a vital role in sustaining communities socially, culturally and economically in the pandemic period. Next, we review literature on diverse and community economies, and consider the role of community fundraising during challenging times such as the current pandemic, before homing in on traditional forms of fundraising used by Pacific peoples. A methodology section then presents diverse and community economies tools used to identify economic conceptualisations, practices and possibilities. The methodology section also describes our pandemic-induced methodology, which is centred on conducting online *talanoa* (fluid conversations between two or more people) with a number of people leading, or involved in, these initiatives. We also analysed activities of online community groups. Findings are then presented, providing examples of online crowd-funding initiatives, entertainment provided via livestreaming to solicit donations, and bartering pages on social media sites. To conclude, we stress the enduring nature of communal bonds and traditional systems which Pacific people readily adapt and translate into different forms in the face of challenges such as the restrictions and financial hardships caused by COVID-19.

Literature review

Community relational economic practices

Community relational economic practices can be defined as ‘diverse, ethically negotiated practices that support the livelihoods of humans and non-humans to build flourishing habitats’ (Gibson-Graham, 2019: 127). These practices broaden the notion of wealth by presenting forms of collaborative economic engagement that respect and require the sharing and gifting of output (de la Torre Parra, 2021a). The theory behind diverse economies compels us to observe that the ways human livelihoods around the world are protected and maintained require a myriad of different modes of economic engagement and enterprise – many of which are not capitalist (Gibson-Graham, 2005; Dombroski *et al.*, 2018). Gibson-Graham’s diverse economies approach draws and expands on the work of feminist, global South and Indigenous theorists, who ‘know all too well that the unpaid work of women, family members, subsistence farmers, small traders, indigenous land-carers, and worker and producer cooperatives ‘hold up half of the sky’’ (Gibson-Graham, 2019: 128). In acknowledging this diversity, it is important that non-capitalist enterprises not be essentialised, meaning they are not assumed to be characterised by a particular pro-social or environmental ethic.

In recognising a diversity of economies we can foster the notion of ‘community economies’, which counters the capitalocentrism of dominant economic relations, and identifies diverse logics of interdependence that inform actions and transactional relationships (Gibson-Graham, 2005, 2006a, 2008). Community economies are made up of ‘particular combinations of work, exchange, production, distribution, investment and ownership that help our communities to survive *well* (rather than just survive)’ (Dombroski *et al.*, 2018: 101). Yet community relational economic practices whose rationalities emanate from placed-based world views and visions (Escobar, 2008), and which negotiate, and at times go against the grain of modernisation, have been ‘positioned as ‘traditional’, ‘rural’ and largely superseded’ (Gibson *et al.*, 2018: 3). In this article, we demonstrate the enduring nature and value of such community relational practices, suggesting that these ‘traditional’ practices should not be disparaged,

but rather upheld and sustained. This is because their continued practice has an intrinsic strength and reliability in the face of the uncertainty, periodic downturns and social inequalities that are features of capitalist economies at all scales (de la Torre Parra, 2021a). This was evidenced, for example, by the reliability of *tabu* (shell wealth) to provide local economies in East New Britain, Papua New Guinea with an established and robust means to withstand the far reaching socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. During these times Gunantuna Tolai people expanded the use of *tabu* for bartering and exchange in the absence of easy access to the national currency (Fainu, 2020).

Indigenous communities across the world hold traditional practices that express such social and economic interdependence. Practices of collective and voluntary work such as the Andean *minka* (or *minga*) not only centre Indigenous values of communal well-being such as reciprocity and relationality, they also currently embody Indigenous resistance movements (Pacari, 1984; CONAIE, 2007; Rua Angulo, 2007; Tenesaca, 2010; Altmann, 2013; Obando, 2015; Botero Gomez, 2019). At present, the *minka* has become a collective response to the devastating impacts of the global pandemic, both at the community level through relational support practices, and at the national level as a collective political response to the precarity, marginalisation and disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on Indigenous and marginalised populations across the Andean countries (EFE, 2020; Ospina-Valencia, 2021).

Minka is a political instrument for peaceful resistance, where communities across Latin America come together to '*palabrear*' to 'story together in order to reach consensus' (Tocagón Pujota, 2017; La Hora, 2018; Ospina-Valencia, 2021). It offers a relational and reciprocal space for dialogue between Indigenous groups, Afro-descendent groups, workers unions, unemployed, campesinos, teachers, students, *barrios* (communities, neighbourhoods), environmentalist and feminist collectives. These dialogues have contributed to the emergence of initiatives such as '*Minga por la vida*' or '*Minka for life*', in Ecuador and Colombia, where these groups advocate for their right to actively participate in decisions around the government's

economic and health responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, peace agreements, as well as the agricultural and exploitative industries expansion in Indigenous ancestral lands (CONAIE, 2007; EFE, 2020; Loza Tupiz, 2020). Central to the use of *minka* is the recovery of and sovereignty over ancestral lands, as well as the survival, revival and continuity of community relational practices. Furthermore, the principle of reciprocity fostered by communities practicing the *minka*, offer a different perspective to mainstream economic systems, beyond accumulation and growth (EFE, 2020). Andean Indigenous leaders see the use of *minka* as an avenue to rebuild societies based on profound changes of economic structures, where the objectives and principles of economies are not cost effectiveness or accumulation of wealth, but rather the well-being of people and place, this is the 'Sumak Kawsay' or 'good living' (Dávalos, 2009; Escobar, 2010; Huanacuni Mamani, 2010; Walsh, 2010). Here, the economy is only an instrument at the service of the community (CONAIE, 2007).

Similarly, for many Melanesian peoples, complex and diverse community relational economic practices exemplify a much more 'sustainable trajectory' than what is offered by capitalist economic models alone. For instance, scholars such as Huffman (2019) laments that the promotion of a 'Melanesian lifestyle and *Kastom* economy' 'is seen by economists as 'blocking development' (p.17). Huffman (2019: 17) continues that, by contrast, 'Melanesians tend to see *Kastom* as protecting them from bad development'. '[They thus] promote *Kastom Economi* and protect land rights, agriculture, and self-sufficiency [as] a much more sustainable trajectory than artificial growth models, such as construction proposals, [or the] over-reliance on tourism' (Huffman, 2019: 17). The benefits of revitalising subsistence farming and fishing practices during the coronavirus pandemic when other economic activities like tourism have waned significantly, have been readily apparent (Leweniqila and Vunibola, 2020; Movono and Scheyvens, 2022).

Well-being and resilience, the building of flourishing habitats are at the core of the ethically negotiated practices that make up the relational spaces of diverse economies (Gibson-Graham, 2019; Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020). Community economies

thus shed light on the importance of culturally established systems of interdependence and relational transactions based on: reciprocity, gifting of output and surplus, communal work, nurturing of others (including the vulnerable, disabled, children, elders), caring (for land and place, environment and people) and bartering practices (Spiller *et al.*, 2011; Curry and Koczberski, 2012). For example, successful productive enterprises in the Pacific are often organised around families and kin networks, with flow-on benefits to communities through financial support for communal activities (Cahn, 2008; Curry and Koczberski, 2012).

Pacific peoples and traditions of fundraising

Community relational economic practices are often utilised to support the wider community. In Fiji, social relations known as *veiwekani*, ‘act as bonds that connect individuals to others in the community’ (Movono and Becken, 2017: 6). These social bonds structurally enforce Indigenous Fijian norms and philosophies such as *solesolevaki*, guiding appropriate behaviour and maintaining solidarity within communities. *Solesolevaki*, is a term described as ‘the direct opposite of individualism ... [this] collective community effort, manifests in the communal nature of Fijian society, where everyone is related, and all are obliged to work together’ (Movono and Becken, 2017: 6). This is part of everyday life, whereby many Indigenous Fijians rely on *solesolevaki* to meet various needs through highly reciprocal communal collaborations, from supporting the construction of a new house to raising funds to contribute to their *vanua* and church, and most recently through worldwide fundraising efforts via social media to support those struggling with the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of the latter later become the focus of this article.

Pacific Islanders have used traditional fundraising methods for many years. In Samoan the term for this is *fa'alavelave*, while Fijians talk about *fakawela*. For Fijians, *fakawela* are useful in raising funds for community infrastructure and services, and to support communities that have faced a disaster or other major hardship. For example, *fakawela* might involve fundraising for supplies for the local school or

for the materials to instal footpaths in a village (Boufof-Bastick, 2003; Hughes and Scheyvens, 2018). *Fa'alavelave*, meanwhile, are ‘obligatory ceremonial exchanges involving events such as births, marriages, weddings, funerals, chiefly title bestowals, and church openings’ (Shankman, 2018: 93). Matapo and Allen (2020) explain that *fa'alavelave* are important at such milestone events to acknowledge a person’s movement through different stages of life. Even Samoans who live abroad engage in *fa'alavelave*, as helping out family and contributing to the communal effort is a significant part of Samoan culture (Glover *et al.*, 2013; Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2014). Shankman (2018) argues that *fa'alavelave* is now manifested through remittances, changing the traditional structure of how it has functioned. During COVID-19, the importance of *fa'alavelave* and *fakawela* was highlighted through fundraising efforts which helped keep communities afloat (Chaudhary, 2021).

Community fundraising during COVID-19

During COVID-19, fundraising in various forms has been significant for many vulnerable communities and groups. For example, Catholic priests in rural areas had to be creative when lockdown restrictions cut them off from forms of income for their communities. A reverend in Zimbabwe opened a brewery to sustain funds to the parish, while a reverend in Malawi auctioned off the parish pigs (Karombo, 2021). Although governments and international non-governmental organisations have provided vital support for the most vulnerable in many places, we are more focused on smaller scale, community-centred organising which has been evolved to deal with the difficulties that COVID-19 has presented. Specifically, we focus in this article on examples of fundraising using virtual spaces.

Worldwide, many web-based crowdfunding campaigns emerged in the initial stages of the pandemic, however, these were centred on mostly discreet financial transactions, often to help an individual cause (e.g. a person or family affected by life-threatening illness or tragedy) (Igra *et al.*, 2021). There has, however, been little published about the phenomenon of communities using virtual fundraising for support during this time. Exceptions include research about the Zhejiang Provincial Charity

Federation in China, which purchased and distributed medical supplies for local hospitals, such as protective suits and surgical masks, to make up for the deficit, partially through an online fundraising effort (Cheng *et al.*, 2020). Another innovative approach in New York involved online fundraising to support access to health care for black and brown communities who were at risk of being unfairly impacted by the effects of the pandemic (Rodriguez, 2020). One group also used virtual platforms to host a comedy fundraiser, which led to purchases of protective equipment for vulnerable communities (Entis, 2020). Virtual fundraising and innovation in this space is something that is familiar to Pacific Island peoples also, which will be demonstrated in this article.

Methodology

The Pacific: Mapping a diverse economic landscape

The Pacific is a diverse economic landscape. The work and resulting literature behind the diverse economies project (Gibson *et al.*, 2013; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2016) helps us identify and acknowledge this landscape, which is made up of a whole range of capitalist and non-capitalist enterprises. In the Pacific context, a diversity of economic engagements and relational economic practices contribute to the survival and well-being of people and places (Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs, 2012; McKinnon *et al.*, 2016). What is at times overlooked through a singular view of the economy, is ‘the daily reshaping and negotiation involved in Indigenous communities’ engagement with both capitalist and noncapitalist economic systems’ (de la Torre Parra, 2021a: 156). In this reshaping and negotiation, Melanesian peoples also engage in community economies, in what Gibson-Graham *et al.* (2013: 25) have described as a ‘situated and diverse space of ethical decision making and negotiated interdependence’. This actively broadens the pervasive singular idea of ‘the economy’. It also reflects the diversity of place-based ecologies of productivity that contribute to growing discourses of economic difference and to a politics of

economic innovation (Escobar, 2001; Gibson *et al.*, 2013).

This study draws on tools developed by diverse economies and community economies scholars and activists in order to identify some of the diversity of Fijian community economic responses to COVID-19, namely their virtual fundraising responses. The diversity of economic practices include: various types of labour and ways of compensating it; doing business differently, which encompasses a wide range of economic transactions of goods and services and ways of negotiating; as well as many forms of enterprise and ways of producing, appropriating, and distributing surplus (Gibson-Graham, 2006b, 2019; Hicks, 2009). This diversity of practices has, however, often been ‘excluded from mainstream economic theories, or included only as subordinate practices unable to ‘drive’ economic dynamism’ (Gibson-Graham, 2019: 128). Gibson-Graham’s diverse economy table, shown below in Table 1, encapsulates this diversity of forms of labour, transactions of goods and services, as well as enterprise. This table template serves in this study as one of the tools that helps us map a part of the diversity of Fijian communities’ economic responses to the COVID-19 crisis.

Table 1. The diverse economy table

Transactions	Labour	Enterprise
MARKET	WAGE	CAPITALIST
ALTERNATIVE MARKET	ALTERNATIVE PAID	ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST
Fair trade	Self-employed	State owned
Alternative currencies	Reciprocal labour	Environmentally responsible
Underground market	In-kind	Socially responsible
Barter	Work for welfare	Non-profit
NON-MARKET	UNPAID	NON-CAPITALIST
Household sharing	Housework	Worker cooperatives
Gift giving	Volunteer	Sole proprietorships
Hunting, fishing, gathering	Self-provisioning	Community enterprise
Theft, piracy, poaching	Slave labour	Feudal Slave

Source: Adapted from Gibson-Graham (2006b) and Hicks (2009).

Table 2. Questions used to identify community economies responses to the COVID-19 crisis through virtual fundraising in Fiji

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- What have communities needed to live healthy lives materially, psychically and culturally during these times of crisis? How have they survived well?
 - What have communities done with what is left over after they have met their own survival needs? How have they distributed surplus during these times of crisis?
 - What type of relationship do these communities have with people and environments that have enabled them to survive well? How have they encountered others as they seek to survive well during these times of crisis?
 - What materials, mechanisms and energy have these communities used in the process of surviving well during these times of crisis? What has been consumed in the process?
 - How have these communities maintained, restored and replenished place and knowledge (vanua and related wisdom and principles) that all humans and non-humans rely on? How have these communities cared for *vanua* and therefore people and place during these times of crisis?
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Source: Adapted from Gibson-Graham (2014, 2019: 128).

The language of possibility offered by the community economies project also contributes to mapping this diverse economic landscape. Questions posed by proponents of community economies (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013) are thus also used in this study as a tool to identify and then describe the diversity of efforts by Fijian communities that are ‘aimed at building more ethically responsible ways of negotiating survival – that is basic needs provision – and of regenerating and distributing the surplus [that has enabled these communities not only to withstand the pandemic’s far reaching impacts, but have also supported] life to flourish’ (Gibson-Graham, 2019: 128) in these times of crisis. The questions in the table below (Table 2) have been adapted to guide this study’s identification and description of community economic responses to this crisis through virtual fundraising in Fiji.

Using the aforementioned tools, the discussion section of this article discusses the importance of a diverse and community economies framing to this study.

The study

This study started as part of a research project developed in 2020 by two scholars whose work centres around tourism and sustainable development. These scholars were interested to learn how Pacific peoples who were usually dependent on tourism income were responding to the COVID-19 pandemic impacts. The aim of the project was to ascertain how tourism could be reimagined in more inclusive and sustainable ways in future, especially in light of some of the industry’s characteristics of precarity that have been exposed by the pandemic. One author, who is Fijian, has over a decade of experience researching tourism in the Pacific, and another author, who is *palagi* (of European origins) has over 20 years of experience in the field. These two scholars are co-authors of this article alongside an invited scholar, a *mestiza* woman from the Ecuadorian Andes, with almost a decade of experience in development and education research and practice in the Pacific; as well as a research assistant.

A study inspired by community relational economic practices (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2013), and which advocates for the active promotion of Indigenous philosophies of life, demands a methodological approach to research that centres Indigenous peoples’ concerns, methods, purposes and outcomes throughout the research process. Guided by the Pacific research principles laid out in the Pacific Research and Policy Centre at Massey University (Massey University, 2017), this research encouraged a process whereby respect for relationships, reciprocity, holism, respect for knowledge holders, and using research to do good, were at the centre. This meant that rather than being positioned as ‘victims’ of the global pandemic, all participants were seen as ‘experts’, ‘leaders’ and ‘innovators’ with deep knowledge and capabilities, extensive relationships and established networks as well as resources. For this virtual fundraising part of the study all data collection took place online. In keeping with the principles of reciprocity and using research to do good, the authors shared the research findings in a timely fashion through a short article in *The Conversation* (Movono *et al.*, 2021), as well as a presentation during the Pacific Islands Tourism Research Symposium in 2021 (de la Torre Parra, 2021b). This is also available to all via the

two co-authors project's dedicated research website (Movono and Scheyvens, 2023). One of the co-authors of this study also commissioned a Fijian band involved in fundraisers to play, over Twitter space jams, at a social function at her home in Aotearoa New Zealand. Those present during the event contributed to the payment made to the artists. Holism as a principle has also informed the way in which the research has been designed, as the interconnection of physical, social, cultural, economic, environmental and spiritual aspects of Indigenous communities in the South Pacific is intrinsic to the lines of inquiry of this study.

Method

Conducting this research under COVID-19 border and travel restrictions as well as lockdowns, required the pursuit of adaptive approaches to data collection. Since most of the participants were either part of the Fijian diaspora or were under lockdown restrictions in Fiji, this research used an altered, technologically infused version of *talanoa* via Zoom, guided by the Fijian researcher. *Talanoa* are fluid discussions or sharing of ideas and stories between two or more people: this is considered a more organic and contextually appropriate method for some contexts than structured interviews (Nabobo-Baba, 2008). By using Zoom for *talanoa*, we were embedding technology within social settings and subverting pandemic-related limitations. The researchers held *talanoa* sessions via Zoom with four participants: three of these participants are young creatives and fashion designers; one is a virtual gamer, whose digital fundraising efforts supported a local NGO delivering humanitarian assistance to people in need.

Data was also gathered through analysis of social media sites on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter where groups formed, and initiatives emerged, dedicated to digital fundraising as a response to the impacts brought upon by the pandemic across Fiji. Some of the groups and initiatives discussed in this study were public and some were private, with both their targeted audience and site accessibility focused on Fijian peoples in-country and the diaspora. The researchers were able to share in some fundraising initiatives such as 'Twitter

Space Jams' hosted by some of the research participants, as well as watching fundraising performances through Facebook live. Additional material was sourced from Facebook sites such as 'Barter for Better Fiji' (191.3k members, public Facebook group), and 'Ben's Kitchen' (31k members, private Facebook group).

Findings

This section outlines several types of initiatives through which Fijians used digital platforms to support their own households and others in need during the pandemic period. We have categorised these as young creatives and gamers' initiatives, fundraising by cultural or provincial groups, diaspora-led initiatives, and web-based bartering initiatives. They will be discussed in turn.

Young creatives and gamers' fundraising initiatives

Various young Fijian creatives, fashion designers and musicians in Fiji took to Facebook live, Twitter and similar platforms to raise money. For example, Epeli Tuibeqa, the director and fashion designer of Kuiviti Pacific, started using Twitter Space Jams and Facebook Live to raise funds, with support from Taniela Tokailagi, a Seattle-based Fijian, as well as Dan Matanimeke and Dexter Tee in Fiji. Many performers who were formerly employed at tourist resorts held virtual concerts through these Space Jams and Facebook Live spaces, for example, doing a 2-hour set of their favourite songs. These spaces draw up to 300 listeners from across Fiji, but also diaspora in the United States and from as far away Mongolia. These events were promoted via the hashtag 'TeamFiji'. Space Jams events can raise between FJD\$1000 and \$3000 per event, with funds directed to households in need, including single parents, widows and vulnerable sex workers.

During *talanoa* sessions with participants, we discovered that for many, the loss of income and employment in the entertainment and tourism industries due to the pandemic had socio-economic consequences, such as the inability to buy food, pay school fees or access health resources for themselves and their families. This is what first mobilised them to create web-based

crowdfunding campaigns. Epli Tuibeqa explained that these events quickly expanded beyond support for the struggling artists themselves:

'So far we've hosted over 26 artists. For the artists, whatever genre they come under ... the support has been overwhelming'.

'We have collected over \$40,000 ... There's a page on Facebook called 'Families Helping Families Fiji' that we liaise with ... and after some of the gigs we just contact them and they send us the number of a family and we send them money for their needs'.

Epli Tuibeqa, Talanoa session, July 2021

An interesting development was the involvement of virtual gamers in online fundraising efforts. Dan Qalilawa (with 75 000 followers) first began livestreaming his games as an alternative income source for his household, but realised he could use his platform for pandemic relief:

'I was thinking to myself, maybe there's a way where we can just, you know, do it for ourselves, and help ourselves [... but then I realised] this is another way to empower people. This is another way to make people rise up'

Dan Qalilawa, virtual gamer, Talanoa session, July 2021

Having recently raised more than FJD\$7000 to assist non-profit organisations such as Operation Grace, a group started specifically to support households in financial strife during the pandemic by providing them with basic food requirements (Movono *et al.*, 2021), Dan extols the potential of using technology to make a difference:

'While people may think that gaming is a waste of time, it has allowed me to make money to support strangers. Virtual spaces are opportunities for people to be creative and use social connections to get things done for our people – it has been very fulfilling to create change, albeit from the digital realm'

Dan Qalilawa, virtual gamer, Talanoa session, July 2021

A common theme across these initiatives is that crowdfunding through music, fashion and other

artistic performances as well as livestreaming virtual gaming sessions, always carries a component of caring for the vulnerable either by direct donation to families in need or by working alongside local community groups and NGOs (e.g. #FijiBackToSchoolAid alongside the Foundation for the Education of Needy Children [FENC]) in their humanitarian assistance operations (e.g. food parcels, cash donations, school fees).

While the funds raised were a central component of their activities, these initiatives also had social and cultural exchange functions. For example, during Twitter Space Jams held on Sundays in 2021, there was a focus on fellowship and care for others rather than on raising money: people were encouraged to share their experiences, challenges and hopes with a supportive online audience.

Fundraising by cultural/provincial groups

Some provincial groups did fundraising through online *fakawela* nights. *Fakawela*, originally a Tongan term, is the cultural practice of spontaneous giving of gifts or money during dances, performances or functions: in the past it has been used almost exclusively for face-to-face events, but during the pandemic it evolved into a major means of online fundraising. For instance, #kadavuyouthproject raised FJD\$4000 on September 2021 via a 'Virtual Kati Night' particularly focused on supporting sustainable development programmes for youth (Manu-Dui-Tagi Alliance, 2021). The researchers also visited websites for specific cultural or provincial groups, such as the 'Nadroga Youths from Tailevu', 'Bua Urban Youth' and 'Bula Ko Lau', which held large *fakawela* through Facebook Live to support people in their provinces. In 2021, the 'Hawka Gang' donated almost FJD \$20000 worth of assistance including food parcels for households with elderly residents in Sigatoka, groceries donated to Toga village, and farming tools for youths in the Bemana district (Nacei, 2021).

'Bula Ko Lau', held a virtual livestream fundraising concert for the Lau province in September 2021, targeting the diaspora (Bula Ko Lau, 2021). This concert had numerous performers and took place across several hours, and as people donated, their names appeared

on screen along with their donated amount which helped to provide a sense of accountability to the organisers of this event. They raised more than FJD\$20000 which they planned to use to purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) for those at risk from catching COVID-19, and organised food parcels for people in need in the Lau group. They also intended to support struggling musicians and entertainers who had been out of work for over a year because of resort closures, along with Lauans who were displaced from their homes due to COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions (Talebula-Nuku, 2021).

Diaspora-led initiatives

Members of the Fijian diaspora all around the world who have established a presence online also raised funds to support family, friends and those struggling with the second outbreak of the pandemic.

'Fiji Back To School Aid', was a Go Fund Me campaign created by a group of overseas Fijians including US-based Taniela Tokailagi. They raised over US\$20 000 which was provided to the Fijian NGO, FENC. This has ensured that hundreds of children have school supplies, at a time when their parents are struggling to provide basic necessities, like food (Darmadi, 2020; Go Fund Me, 2020).

Web-based bartering initiatives

'Barter for Better Fiji' represents the new barter economy that emerged in 2020 using Facebook as its platform: this was later adopted by other Pacific countries (Boodoosingh, 2020; Fogarty, 2020; Finau and Scobie, 2022). It 'was created by a group of women who saw the possibility of bartering as a means to help cash-strapped Fijians receive essential goods' (Tora, 2020 in Finau and Scobie, 2022: 2) as well as allowing Fijians to obtain goods by exchanging goods or providing services (Fogarty, 2020). This initiative attracted international attention with national and international news outlets reporting the myriad of bartering exchanges: 'two piglets for a pre-loved kayak, a taxi fare in exchange for fresh produce, hot cross buns for online tutoring, an old carpet for a professional photography session, vegetable seedlings for homemade pies, and offers to have backyards cleaned for prayers' (Tora, 2020). With almost 200 000 Facebook

members in 2021, 'Barter for Better Fiji' points at an increasingly strong and established group that seeks to 'nurture a community of kindness through bartering' through non-cash transactions, collective guidelines and by recalling how Fijian ancestors practiced *veisa*, 'lived by exchanging what they had for what they needed' (Barter for Better Fiji, 2021).

In other examples from the Barter for Better Fiji Facebook site, Fijian peoples offered to paint a house in exchange for food, or to wash clothes in exchange for cooking oil, or to do odd jobs for half a day in exchange for powdered milk. Other members bartered clothes from their household for a birthday cake for their child's birthday. There are also new practices emerging where people ask directly for assistance, especially for their children's needs, such as nappies and milk. They then send pics of what they have bought with the donated funds which provides a sense of accountability to the group. It is apparent from the responses to such requests that many Fijians use the Barter for Better Fiji site to support others who have greater needs than themselves, rather than only to seek help.

Discussion

The importance of a diverse and communities economies framing to this study

The importance of a diverse and community economy framing to this study is three-fold. First, it is a way to widen the scope of economic conceptualisations, practices and future possibilities. Second, it is a way to explore economic practices that reflect broader social, cultural, ethical and environmental commitments. Third, and central to this paper, as a way to explore community economic practices that reflect Indigenous and Pacific peoples' diverse, dynamic and innovative economic responses to social-economic and political challenges, which they (re)grow, adapt and expand in light of contemporary concerns whilst remaining firmly rooted in Indigenous wisdom and relational principles.

Using the diverse and community economies tools presented in the methodology section of this article, this section discusses how the emphasis on social, cultural and environmental

ethical commitments evidenced in the development of virtual fundraising practices during the COVID-19 crisis contribute to the acknowledgment of a diverse economic landscape. This economic landscape is made up of a whole range of cultural responsibilities and commitments by Fijian communities, rather than of capitalist concerns alone. Furthermore, and central to this study, these tools contribute to a broader discussion about economic responses to the pandemic impacts, which have led Fijian communities to (re)grow community economic practices in the virtual space that are rooted in Indigenous wisdom and principles.

Diverse and community economies tools

The diverse economy framing (in Table 3) serves as a tool to widen the scope of economic conceptualisations, practices and future possibilities by exploring new ways in which Fijian peoples are relating to ‘the economy’ in their response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the use of virtual fundraising methods. Moreover the diverse economy framing in this study is not solely focused on revealing and mapping economic diversity for its own sake, rather it aims to uncover ‘diverse economic practices [that] reflect broader social [and place-based] ethical commitments’ (Hicks, 2009: 20). Table 3 thus summarises a myriad of transactions, labour and enterprise/initiative structures that emerged as community responses to this crisis, which are revealed through a diverse economies lens. In terms of diverse economic transactions (see Table 3 column one), bartering, gift giving, and virtual fundraising were built on community supported events and initiatives. For labour remuneration (see Table 3 column two), fundraising initiatives exercised a diversity of alternative arrangements. Many initiatives emerged as self-employment alternatives in direct response to the loss of employment during the crisis. In-kind and reciprocal labour as well as unpaid aspects of volunteering were involved in the organisation of fundraising events and initiatives. The structures of these initiatives (see Table 3 column three) spanned across alternative and non-capitalist structures. Many of these initiatives – including those organised by cultural and community – focused on social responsibility, for example by raising funds to support pandemic-related

response and operations of local humanitarian assistance organisations such as Operation Grace and FENC.

The community economies tool (in Table 2) is used in this study to support the exploration of economic practices that reflect broader social, cultural, ethical and environmental commitments. The line of inquiry presented in Table 2 helped in identifying the concerns of community economies which supported the emergence of community relational economic practices as response to the COVID-19 crisis through virtual fundraising in Fiji. This line of inquiry thus helped identified initiatives, innovations, practical experiments and community organising that emerged with a focus on social, psychical, cultural and environmental commitments.

During these times of crisis, Fijian communities needed employment and related income, the provision of basic necessities such as food, and services including access to medical attention, school fees. Importantly, these fundraising initiatives supported the need to strengthen social relations and kinship connections, as well as the ability to continue their spiritual practices through transactions, labour and organising that centre material, psychical and cultural survival and well-being. Several of these initiatives started up as a direct response to job losses during the pandemic, with individuals fundraising to support their ability to provide for their own families. Nevertheless, when they were able to fulfil their own family basic needs, they continued organising, participating and expanding these initiatives to support the broader community, distributing funds among households in need, and vulnerable parts of the population.

Relationships and kinship are at the core of Fijian communities’ survival. The well-being of Fijian peoples and their places during these times of crisis depended on intricate webs of connection. The virtual fundraising initiatives presented in this study were built on that web of connections and kinship, with virtual events that drew hundreds of viewers from across Fiji and the diaspora and were promoted via the hashtag ‘TeamFiji’. Ben’s Kitchen helped other chefs who lost their jobs during the pandemic. Fakawela events were organised by community groups relying on cultural and provincial connections, distributing food parcels to households with elderly residents, groceries to

Table 3. The diverse economies practices of virtual fundraising responses to the COVID-19 crisis in Fiji

Transactions	Labour	Enterprise
<p>MARKET</p> <p>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community supported virtual fundraising initiatives (Twitter Space Jams and Facebook live concerts, virtual gaming and <i>Fakawela</i> events) Ben's Kitchen (virtual market for prepared food) Barter for Better Fiji (Barter/<i>veisa</i>) 	<p>WAGE</p> <p>ALTERNATIVE PAID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-employed (Ben's Kitchen, Twitter Space Jams, Facebook live concerts and virtual gaming – where chefs, musicians and gamers who lost their jobs due to the pandemic receive a small payment for labour) In-kind and Reciprocal Labour (Barter for Better Fiji where community members also exchange labour including caring for land) 	<p>CAPITALIST</p> <p>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socially responsible initiatives (Twitter Space Jams, Facebook live concerts, <i>Fakawela</i> events and virtual gaming – all initiatives contributed to social-economic crisis relief efforts in their communities, including raising funds for local humanitarian assistance organisations)
<p>NON-MARKET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gift giving (Twitter Space Jams, Facebook live and <i>Fakawela</i> events, and virtual gaming – distributing donations and surplus among households in need and vulnerable population. #FijiBacktoSchoolAid (Go-fund-me donations gifted to support education relief efforts) 	<p>UNPAID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer (unpaid aspects of volunteering involved in the organisation of events related to initiatives such as Twitter Space Jams and Facebook live concerts, virtual gaming and <i>Fakawela</i> events) 	<p>NON-CAPITALIST</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community initiative (cultural and provincial community groups organising – e.g. virtual fundraising through <i>Fakawela</i> events)

households in need and farming tools to youth across their provinces. During this crisis, bartering practices behind the Bartering for a Better Fiji initiative supported ethical consumption through the redistribution and recirculation of goods such as food, clothes and even sport equipment such as kayaks. The consumption of electricity, internet access and digital devices were central to running these virtual fundraising initiatives. The environmental impact of this consumption could become the source of subsequent research. The next sections expand on the centrality of care of Fijian peoples and their places through community relational economic practices that are rooted on Indigenous knowledge and relational principles.

Solesolevaki practice and principles in the virtual space

While the expectation might be that in increasingly commercialised and westernised

societies many traditions would dwindle, that is not what has been experienced in the case of the communities we researched in the Pacific during the pandemic period. Rather, *solesolevaki* has been practised during a time of extreme economic stress for many households, in a wide range of modes as reflective of changes in technology and society. More Fijians are now living in towns, or have emigrated to seek other educational and employment opportunities. Most households have access to at least one digital device, with smart phones being most common. Rather than choosing to disconnect from those back home in times of need, Fijians elsewhere in the country or abroad have rallied together to find ways, using digital platforms, to raise funds and provide tangible support.

Dan Qalilawa has witnessed a trend that has arisen in Fiji since the outbreak of the Delta variant, that is ‘an outpouring of giving and an outpouring of individuals rising up and helping

their neighbours'. This solidarity was evident among the gaming community:

'I started building my streaming community based around Fiji. And then when a lot of people were coming into my space, then I expanded it out to the Pacific. So right now it's well known throughout the Pacific. From Papua New Guinea, Solomons, Tahiti, to Cook Islands. We are lucky in [that] the gaming space in Fiji and the community that I'm a part of, have always been about giving back to the community'
(Dan Qalilawa, Talanoa session, July 2021).

The success of the 'Twitter Space Jams' initiative is due to many reasons, however, for Epeli Tuibega this is mainly due to its audience:

'One thing I know for a fact is that the majority of our audience and listeners are (indigenous) Fijians. I think they also understand the concept of solesolevaki, which basically means in a group with lots of people you help one person with the struggle that they're going through, in the hopes that when the next person needs help that person will come with their family to assist. So, with that concept, I am sure all Fijians are onboard with the event, the Twitter Jam Space. And everyone flocks ... to support [us] if there is a concert. Knowing that when it's our turn we will also get the same support' (Epeli Tuibega, Talanoa session, July 2021)

This sentiment aligns with a well-known Fijian proverb – *solia vakalevu, ko na ciqo vakalevu*. This means that more you give, the more you will receive – which lies at the heart of reciprocity in the Pacific.

Similarly, when Taniela Tokailagi referred to 'Twitter Space Jams' and 'Fiji Back to School Aid' initiatives, he reflected on the cultural principles behind them:

'I would like to just call this whole thing a solesolevaki in the digital era it's about how deeply we are connected regardless of where we are in the world. [Fijian] people are still well versed in their culture and what to do when something like this happens in terms of a pandemic ... we are deeply rooted in our culture.

That's something that I really admire when working with these artists, even those of us who have lived overseas for quite a while. I'm so impressed with the generation back home and how they've carried things in terms of their humility and respecting each other in these spaces. We still have that iTaukei [Indigenous Fijian] respect amongst ourselves.

And it's just the right thing when someone is in dire need of assistance. It shows we respect one another through sharing whatever we have' (Taniela Tokailagi, Talanoa session, July 2021)

[Re-]growth of relational economies

The success and growth of the above initiatives point to the intrinsic strength and contemporary reliability of traditional and relational economic practices, even in the face of health and economic crises. This is evidenced by the reliability of *solesolevaki* in the virtual space to provide Fijian communities with a robust, adaptive and established means to weather the widespread social and economic impacts of the pandemic.

For example, the way in which Dan Qalilawa is using online gaming, a modern phenomenon to fundraise to support those in need in Fiji during the pandemic, is very reflective of the more traditional relational economies that Fijians know well. Dan is essentially using a gaming entertainment to contribute to the creation of a different type of economy:

'It is a different form of entertainment [that] it's not controlled by the mainstream media. It's a creator economy. We are the ones who are driving it.

There is accountability in whatever that they [donors] are giving ... through livestream where [people] can actually see the person that is organising it, they can see the face, they can see the amount of money that is coming in and going out. And I think that gives them a bit of security in terms of knowing where the money is going to go to' (Dan Qalilawa, virtual gamer, Talanoa session, July 2021)

As shown also in the case of Barter for Better Fiji, Fijian communities are harnessing social

media and other digital tools to help themselves, and others. In doing so they have reinvigorated old traditions of adaptivity, innovation, reciprocity and solidarity to support those currently in need. Some Fijians have been innovative in terms of identifying where they have assets or capitals – which are sometimes tangible things like piglets or vegetables or farm implements, and other times are services or skills they can provide such as tutoring or motor repair – which can be traded, without a need for cash.

Through this, these communities are also contributing to expanding economic conceptualisations, practices and future possibilities by engaging in economic practices that reflect broader social, cultural, ethical and environmental commitments. In this way, ‘the economy’ is thus a diverse space of ethical decision making and negotiated interdependence, where traditional reciprocal relationships fit well with, and broaden our understanding of, modern online giving. This ultimately contributes to the growing literature around diversified economic adaptation and community relational economic practices (Gibson-Graham, 2005; Dombroski et al., 2018), but not as crisis-driven, secondary or marginal to the capitalocentrism of dominant economic relations. Rather, such practices provide examples of contextualised, robust and reliable sources of economic interdependence that ensure the cultural, social-economic, political, environmental and spiritual wellbeing of local peoples (Leweniqila and Vunibola, 2020; de la Torre Parra, 2021b; Finau and Scobie, 2022; Movono and Scheyvens, 2022). This well-being is built on the collective protection of *vanua*; on the redistribution of wealth and resources; and on culturally specific values of reciprocity and labour that nurture *veivewani*, tribe, clan and family identity.

Conclusions

Our research explored community relational economic practices behind social media and digital fundraising platforms created and utilised by a diversity of Fijian peoples and communities. We argued that this response to the COVID-19 crisis is a contemporary, context-specific manifestation of enduring traditional

Fijian practices that contribute to community well-being and resilience (Movono and Becken, 2017; Finau and Scobie, 2022). It speaks of the centrality of established systems of social and economic interdependence and relational transactions (Cahn, 2008; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Boodoosingh, 2020; de la Torre Parra, 2021b), which, based on cultural Fijian values such as *solesolevaki*, are informing several creative initiatives crossing the digital divide to provide support to those hardest hit by the pandemic.

Fijians involved in the response to the COVID-19 crisis have used social media and live-streaming in order to fundraise for those affected by massive job losses in industries such as tourism and entertainment (Fiji Trades Union Congress, 2020), as well as to support community groups. Their digital fundraising strategies have provided humanitarian assistance to households in need, schools and other vulnerable communities. Across the world, many web-based crowdfunding campaigns emerged in the initial stages of the pandemic, nevertheless, these were centred on mostly discreet financial transactions, largely focused on supporting individual cases. What makes the use of virtual crowdfunding different in the case of the Fijian communities researched in this study, is that the use of digital tools is aligned with social and cultural exchange platforms that are based on traditional Fijian values dedicated to ensuring collective wellbeing. This response is a novel adaptive strategy in that Fijians are tapping into their cultural relations as a means to collectively respond to a crisis.

Findings suggest that community fundraising has increasingly moved on to digital platforms during the pandemic. This trend may seem novel for its use of modern digital tools for crisis-responsive crowdfunding, yet its creative, resilient and adaptive character are rooted in age-old community relational practices of collective work, economic support and social interdependence – such as *solesolevaki*. This is because a key feature of Indigeneity ‘is the capacity for radical adaptation [...] embracing external ideas and technologies through enduring values and practices embedded in Indigenous tradition’ (Finau and Scobie, 2022: 2). These increasing trends inform us of past, present and future possibilities for strengthening

community resilience by bringing together traditional wisdom and contemporary digital capability. Relationally, these trends reach a large global diaspora and bring together diverse Fijian peoples. This study points to the intrinsic strength and reliability of traditional economic practices in the face of uncertainty, periodic downturns and social inequalities; evidenced by the reliability of *solesolevaki* in the virtual age to provide local economies in Fiji with an established, adaptive and robust means to withstand the diverse impacts of the pandemic. This study also highlights that *solesolevaki* in the digital era is about the deep connection of Fijian peoples to one another and to their culture, regardless of where they are in the world.

The ongoing social-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have prompted a deepening of community relational economic practices by Fijian peoples, including in the virtual space. By relating to 'the economy' as a 'situated and diverse space of ethical decision making and negotiated interdependence' (Gibson *et al.*, 2013), Fijian peoples involved in social media and live-streaming crowdfunding initiatives, are asserting relational economic practices to increase resilience and combat the ongoing effects of the pandemic. This has allowed for collective values and custom to be centred in economic practice. This has encouraged the undoing of privileging of certain activities or values 'as more important to and directive of the economy' (Gibson-Graham, 2014: 151), while others are marginalised, undervalued or actively erased. These community economies practices have enhanced Fijians' resilience, wellbeing and sense of ownership during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis. These community economies practices ultimately denote Fijian authority, collective power and economic sovereignty.

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Conflict of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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